

Communist University

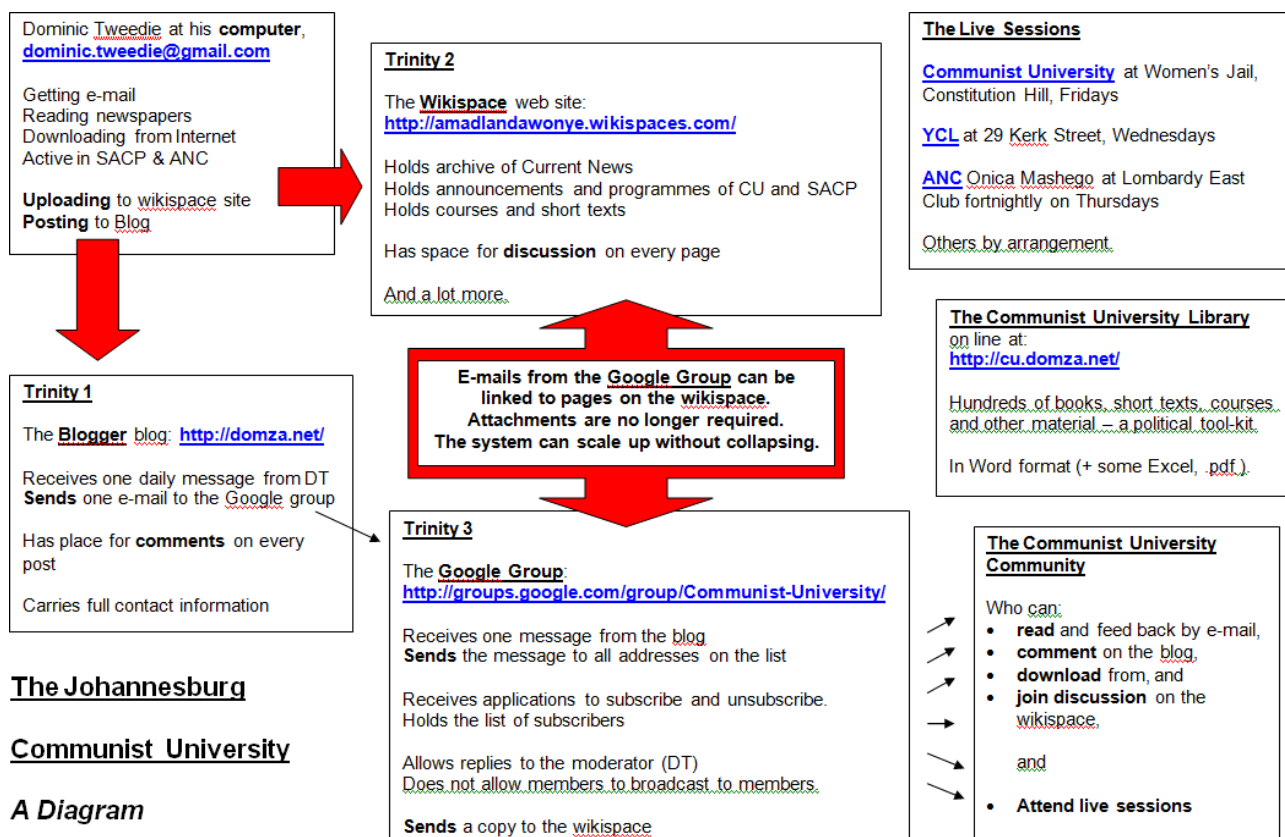


2013

Agitprop

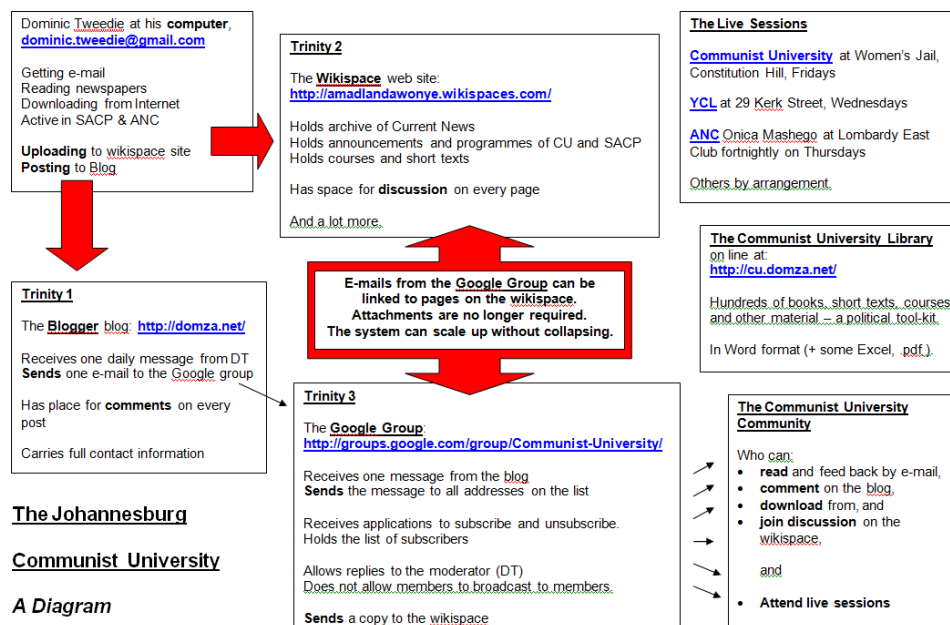
Part 4

Groups, Blogs, Web Sites, Multi-Media and the Universal Device



Communist University Mash, 2005

Agitprop, Part 4



Communist University Mash, 2005

Google Groups, Blogs, Web sites

The above diagram was done in 2005 to help its maker to understand what we were doing in those days. This was when many new and free-to-use facilities became available in very usable and connectable forms. Many of these came from Google. They were technically stable and reliable.

The term “mash”, we discovered later. It means a combination of different services, connected together to produce a very powerful “ensemble”, essentially allowing all the powers of the Internet to be mobilised by individuals. These services were e-mail distribution groups/forums; blogs; free web sites; and wikis.

It is not correct to say that the services upon which the “mash” combinations were based were “free”, or are “free” now. The value that goes in to them is created by the users, in hundreds and thousands of hours of work. This value can be taken away at any time, and this has happened to parts of the CU system. Google services are technically stable but are ultimately not reliable, because they can be withdrawn at any time, at the whim of Google.

There have been some changes to our CU arrangements, but the main outline has not changed. The Communist University is still a combination of e-mail; archiving including web site and blog; extending out to hard copy; and to live sessions.

E-mail distribution groups and forums (Listserve; [Electronic mailing lists](#))

Familiar ones are Google Groups and Yahoo Groups. This message came to you through a Google Group. E-mail can be distributed in bulk with one message. Groups can be set to allow all subscribers to post, in which case they become discussion forums, like this one.

Blogs

“[Blog](#)” is short for “Web log”, meaning a web site that records text in a vertical, scrolling log, or diary. The CU uses blogs to archive these introductory e-mails. Blogs have facility for comments. But the comments do not work for the CU. What works for us is e-mail.

Web sites

Free web sites became available that were easy to operate, in a similar way to using a word processor. Google Sites is one. These are good for archiving.

Wikis

Wikis are web sites that are optimised for collaborative working between two or more members of the site. Each member is jointly and severally the master of the site and can edit it at will. There are checks. The principal one is that all edits can be reversed to the previous condition. Wikis work extremely well when people want to do it. Wikipedia is the best-known example of a successful Wiki. But the Communist University has not been able to get people working together in this way. What works for us is e-mail.

The Rise and Fall of Web 2.0

The growth of “mashing” and the use of “wikis” gave rise to a feeling that something new was going on, and this led to the increased use of the term “[Web 2.0](#)”. The idea that Web 2.0 is substantively different from prior web technologies has been challenged. Wikipedia quotes World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, who describes the term as “jargon”. His original vision of the Web, he says was “a collaborative medium, a place where we [could] all meet and read and write”.

It must be true that “Web 2.0” did not represent a change in the nature of the Internet, but by the same argument, if there has been a subsequent decline in Web 2.0, then it represents a degradation of the Internet, because the two are essentially the same.

One part of the decline in Web 2.0 is the adjustment of the services by the service providers, such as Google. They can do this unilaterally, because the user has no contract, so long as the user is getting the service free.

The Communist University lost a lot of value when the Google Groups dropped “Pages” and “Files”, about two years ago. Google Groups have become even more “funky” again this year.

It is possible to make your own “listserve” to send out mass e-mail, but it is not free. Likewise with your own web sites.

So the days when it was easy are over for the moment. This means that the huge mass of people that were, around the year 2005, surging on to the content-producer side of the web, have been diverted.

Where did they go?

Facebook and Twitter

We will come back to the so-called “social networking” phenomenon later in this part, to consider whether it can be used for Agitprop, or whether, on the contrary, it is designed to prevent Agitprop from happening.

What we can note at this point is that Facebook and Twitter, and a few rather less successful “social networking” facilities, did in fact reverse the growth of creative self-publishing, and what we could call in a political sense, agency, on the World Wide Web.

Using Facebook or Twitter is qualitatively different from “mashing” your own communications. Marshall McLuhan’s famous saying, “The medium is the message,” applies. These social networks impose a uniformity of social communication that is massive, and never revolutionary, or even non-conformist.

PRISM

The latest revelations coming from the USA, as this post is being drafted for the first time, about the collection of data from all sources, and including the “social networking” services, are shicking but not surprising. They show that the idea of the World Wide Web in particular becoming an executive vehicle for revolutionary agitation is practically inconceivable. Even the extent to which it can continue as a vehicle for propaganda, in the political-education sense that is the subject-matter of this course, is uncertain.

We have to go on, and to continue to use all possible means, but we should also preserve things in the form that they have been preserved for centuries, which is the way that we now refer to as “hard copy”, meaning books and other print-on-paper media.



“Multi-media”

Electronic publishing, photos, sound and video

The previous item was to understand at a simple level, and then at a broad policy level, how the Internet, as we call it, meaning the World Wide Web, has been developing in recent years.

In this item we can consider, or discuss, the growth of multi-media “ICT”, where ICT stands for Information and Communication Technology.

Cameras are digital these days. They record images in the form of files, that are computer files and can be saved in computers and opened in computer programmes for manipulation, cropping, and “photo-shopping”.

Sound is recorded in digital files, and so is video.

All this means that text, sound, pictures and moving pictures can all be handled, edited, and combined using an ordinary computer, and even with a laptop or a tablet.

Integrated software that can do all of these tasks is available. The Adobe “Creative Suite” is one of them.

The potential is great and the means are available. What remains is the human factor.

The Human Factor, Politics and Monopoly

The history of computing, or (ICT) is one of mass creativity, periodically commodified, and then quickly monopolised. This is what happened in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when there was huge innovation led by unpaid “amateurs” and by small companies, until it was nearly all captured by the twin and mutually-supporting monopolies of IBM and Microsoft. This cycle has repeated itself many times, and it provides a good example of how capitalism evolves through one technology and towards the next, and how one monopoly can give way to another in the process.

Agitprop, Part 4b



Convergence: Smart Phone

Cell Phone, SMS and Social Media

The hand-held “device”, or “gadget”, such as the one illustrated above, is more than a cell phone. It delivers Internet, e-Mail, other kinds of instant messaging including SMS, plus GPS, still and video camera, sound recording, spreadsheet, word processing, and hundreds or even thousands of other “applications”. It probably delivers live television efficiently as well.

The long-predicted “convergence” has arrived. We cannot say that this is the end of the road. There may be more surprising things coming along. But what we can already say is that the technical ease of doing any kind of communication has only exposed the social and human nature of such communication.

The barriers to communication are now revealed principally human ones, starting with the time it takes to do things. We all have the power, but we do not have time to do more than a fraction of what is possible.

Working together, we could do more. But working together requires organisation. We do organise, and we do succeed to work together to a large extent, in politics.

But when it comes to ICT (Information and Communication Technology), we now have the solo device, like the one shown above, and rather limited collaboration.

Collaboration on monopoly’s terms is not collaboration for revolution

Instead of the widespread mass creativity that caused the very rapid advance of ICT, what monopoly brings is widespread mass conformity.

The phone and the SMS allow certain patterns of communication, but not others. The one that is conducive to political dialogue, it does not allow. The model for such a dialogue is “many-to-many”. It is neither “one-to-one”, like a telephone call, and it is not “one-to-many”, like a radio or television broadcast.

“Many-to-many” is the revolutionary possibility that the new devices make technically possible. In this relationship, it is possible for all the participants to be equally as much producers as they are consumers. This is the model of communism. It is a model of post-capitalist relations of production.

What is the response of bourgeois society to this possibility of its own creation? It is a combination of paternalism and filialism. It is the creation of Facebook, Twitter, and the minor “social networking” platforms.

The characteristic of Facebook and Twitter and the so-called “social networking” idea is the opposite of what it holds itself out to be. This is precisely not the model of communism. In the world of “social networking” all revolutionary possibilities are neutralised and frustrated.

This is so, regardless of the existence of a US Imperialism “PRISM” system that is collecting all communications, including the “social networking” interactions. With

or without the intruding “PRISM”, social networking is counter-revolutionary. It is a dummy. It is sterile and cannot bear fruit.

Our Agitprop has to be the intentional antagonist of bourgeois, counter-revolutionary ICT. Our job is to produce as many creators as we can, meaning not only writers, but also visual artists, makers and performers of all kinds, and people who can master the more difficult parts of ICT.

Course: Agitprop

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